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WEHMAN'S BOOK ON

PIGEONS

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The Pigeon Book

A Handbook on the Care, Feeding and Breeding of Pigeons

— By —

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PIGEONS.

FOR EXHIBITION AND PROFIT.

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CHAPTER I.

General Instructions.

WHETHER for pleasure or profit, nothing is more easy than to keep pigeons, though no doubt there are right and wrong ways of doing that, as there are in everything else in this world; but whether in town or country, on the roof of a lofty mansion—in the spare room of an outhouse—in the hay-loft over the stable—or the cock-loft under the tiles—pigeons will do equally well. There is hardly any situation in which they will not thrive and flourish—with a little care.

They increase in numbers even under the most disadvantageous circumstances, and, as we have said, with a very little care and attention they prosper better than any other domestic pets.

The domesticated pigeons in the United States, for the most part, came originally from England where they were derived from native species. It will therefore be of interest to describe the four principal varieties of wild pigeons found there.

The largest is the *Wood Pigeon*, or *Cushat*, to be found in the tallest trees of most of the wooded districts of England and Scotland. It feeds on the leaves of the turnip and wild berries during winter, in autumn on grain and other seeds, and in summer on grasses and vegetable substances. Its eggs have not unfrequently been hatched under common tame pigeons; but all attempts to domesticate this species have been made in vain. The bird is well-known, however, even to Londoners, from the large numbers which make their appearance in the poulterers' shops during the colder months of the year.

The *Blue-backed Dove*, the second English species that we may mention, is often called in error the stock-dove. This name was given to it from its having been regarded by some persons as the origin of our domestic varieties. This is now well known not to be the case, our tame pigeons being all descended, without doubt, from the blue wild rock pigeons that inhabit the most inaccessible parts of our coast.

The *Turtle Dove* is the smallest and most elegant of the English doves; it is a delicate little bird, unable to bear the severity of our winters, so that it flies away in the autumn to sunnier climes.

The *Rock Dove*, a genuine *Blue Rock* of the pigeon fancier's, is undoubtedly the origin of all our domesticated pigeons. The general colour of this beautiful bird is a light greyish blue, the lower part of the neck being resplendent with brighter metallic reflections. Across the wings are two black bars, and the tail feathers are black at the extremities. The lower part of the back, above the tail, is white, a mark which renders it easily distinguished from the blue-backed dove. The rock dove is a native of the rocky cliffs of most countries in the temperate part of the northern hemisphere, and as all the beautiful varieties of the domestic pigeons have descended from the rock dove, it is very advantageous to know its habits and instincts, so that domestic breeds may be treated in a natural manner. Thus, we see, that as they are all platform-builders, it would be useless to supply them with branches to build their nests in. Again, the rock dove seeks the salt encrusted on the

sea-shore: this instinct remains in all the varieties descended from it, and every breed of pigeons does better if supplied with salt than if kept without. So fond are they of this substance that we have known them, after having been deprived of it for a long time, to devour so much as absolutely to kill themselves. Having stated thus much, we now proceed to show how our domestic pigeons may be most advantageously reared and kept.

There are, of course, many conditions under which they do better than others; but as the common way of keeping pigeons is the very worst that could be devised, we will speak of that first, telling what "*not to do.*"

On no account use the old-fashioned, though in many cases still used, triangular-shaped pigeon-house, fixed high up against the wall of the house—doubtless with a view of keeping it out of the way of cats, rats, or weasels.

You cannot keep pigeons properly *there*, and for this reason: the necessarily shallow nest-places are so exposed to all the changes of the weather that the young ones are killed, sometimes by the extreme heat, but more often by cold and wet, and particularly when they are about ten or twelve days old, when the parent birds often leave the nest in search of food; then the rain drifts into the exposed boxes and the cold winds blow so sharply that the young ones perish before the old ones return.

We should be guided in our treatment of pigeons in respect to their homes by what we see them do in a state of nature: *then* they only rear two pair a-year, and they endeavor, as far as possible, to build their nests in the deep-sheltered recesses of the rocks—generally near the sea-coast: these are the common wild pigeons. But the same care to make their nest in thoroughly sheltered positions is found to be the case with those pigeons which build in trees: the wood pigeon, for example, always makes its nest deep down in the forks of the branches, choosing for the purpose tall trees, generally firs or pines, where the nest is completely sheltered.

What *ought* to be done we will tell and explain further on, and if our directions, which are all thoroughly practical, are followed, it will be found that pigeons may be kept not

only for pleasure but that they are by no means an unprofitable investment.

In purchasing pigeons the following particulars should always be borne in mind.

The eyes of the younger pigeons are smaller, fainter, and less prominent than those of the old ones. The neck of the old bird is longer, stronger, and harder than the young birds, and an old pigeon has darker, harder, and stronger feet, with longer spurs than the younger ones, whose feet are soft, red, and tender.

The brightness and brilliancy of the feathers of the neck afford also a criterion of the age of a pigeon. On the young pigeon the brightness of the colour is scarcely perceptible from that of the plumage of the body; but as the bird advances in age, a beautiful diversity of colour is exhibited, which greatly adds to the appearance of the bird.

Attention must be paid to the number of feathers in the wings and tail. Every wing has at the end three long feathers, called the flight feathers, then six immediately following and gradually diminishing in length, then eight smaller feathers, which gradually increase in length, three of which are more prominent than the others, particularly the centre one. The tail consists of twelve feathers, six on one side and six on the other.

A Fantail pigeon should never have less than thirty-six feathers in its tail.

The common pigeon begins to breed at the age of nine months, and continues breeding during the spring and summer months. The female lays two eggs, and the young produced are generally male and female. With common care, one pair of pigeons will yield the breeder eight or nine pairs in one year, and will continue to do so for three or four years.

The diseases of pigeons are very often the result of careless management, exposure to cold and damp, and an improper supply of food. If you wish to keep your birds in health you must give them a *variation* of food, and you must keep them clean. Always keep their houses clean. Scrape and well scrub houses, nests, perches, &c., with

strong yellow soap and warm water every now and then; but take particular care that every part is dry before the occupants resume their dwelling. Always be sure to *burn* your nests after every brood, and to occasionally give the old birds fresh nests.

If your birds get attacked by vermin, their feathers must be fumigated with tobacco-smoke, repeating this process till the bird is quite free of them. When young pigeons are attacked by what are called the "blacks," or pigeon bugs, the dust of tobacco may be sprinkled over the young birds and in the nest.

Fine fresh gravel should be strewed about the places of confinement of these birds, which they swallow to assist them to digest their food. Always keep a supply of common salt where they can conveniently get it; and give your pigeons fresh water every day, both to drink and to bathe in.

Many persons keep their pigeons between the garret and the roof of the dwelling-house; this answers very well, but the more regular, best, and most convenient way is to have a pigeon-house properly constructed.

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CHAPTER II.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF PIGEON-HOUSES.

THE interior of this must be lined with nests or holes, subdivided by boards, each cell should be twelve inches deep, front to back, and sixteen inches broad, the entrance hole should not be opposite the centre of the cell, but on one side, so that when the pigeon is sitting she is out of sight.

In front of each cell should be put a slip of wood to rest and coo upon, but these slips of wood should not join one another, or your birds will be always quarrelling about the right to walk on these slips, and are apt to fight for the possession of certain cells. If you have one long slip I should advise you to divide it with upright partitions.

The house should be elevated on a wall facing the south-east, and placed at such a height as to be out of the reach of cats, rats, &c. It should be painted white, as pigeons are attracted by that colour. The following one we describe is inexpensive and easily made:—

A barrel perched on top of a pole—an ordinary flour-barrel will do very well, if you take care to caulk the chinks, and give the outside a couple of coats of "lead-colour," and then two more of "dead white." Supposing that you purpose keeping twelve pigeons, you must divide the interior of the barrel into six chambers, with a separate door to each; over the door should be an eave of tin to keep out the rain. The barrel should stand on a rimmed platform, projecting about nine inches all round, and the whole should be very securely fixed on the top of a scaffold-pole, say twenty feet high. It will be much safer if the pole penetrates the platform and barrel, and juts out over all. Bear in mind if your pole is twenty feet out of the ground, it must be seven feet in the ground, and well rammed in with heavy stones.

Cross-pieces of sound beech should be screwed on to the pole at intervals of a foot, to form a ladder, and from the summit of the pole to the bottom a rope should extend to render ascent and descent safer.

At a little more expense, however, you may avoid the trouble, and perhaps danger, of mounting this ladder, by having the barrel so rigged with ropes and a pulley that it may be lowered and hoisted at pleasure. Let the *whole* of your apparatus, including barrel, pole, and rope, be painted *white*, that the birds may perceive it at a distance.

Inside, the chambers should be lime-washed, and this should be renewed once a month.

But a pigeon-loft is undoubtedly the best place to keep your birds, especially if you are rearing them for profit.

This should be a room at the top of the house—two contiguous ones are better—which can be closed or opened at the pleasure of the owner, as this allows easy access so as to properly superintend the regulating of pairing and the rearing of the young.

Such a room or rooms should be fitted up with long pigeon-boxes arranged round the sides, while holes are made on the outside of the building for the pigeons to fly in and out at. Perches should also be placed across the roof upon which the birds may rest to please themselves.

The boxes may be arranged at the gable-end and at the sides of the building, at the height of six or eight feet from the floor, and a short ladder should be kept in the building, for the purpose of getting at them.

The cells should be at least a foot square, and a supply of clean water should be kept in a large pan in the middle of the room, which should have some large stones put into it, to prevent the birds splashing it about.

As to the compartments, or nests, every one must be furnished with a pan, box, or straw basket, of a size adapted for the pigeons for which they are intended: a small tile or flat piece of wood should be placed in front of the pan or basket, to admit of the birds getting in and out of their nests, and the pan should have in it a little clean straw or hay cut short.

What is termed a nest-pan is certainly best. It is a coarse, heavy, earthenware saucer; and if you put a little fine sawdust in the bottom, this works down amongst the straw and forms a soft bed for the eggs to rest upon. Again when it is necessary to clean round the nest, the pan is easily lifted up without handling the young birds, which is liable to do them a great deal of injury.

Sand or gravel should be sprinkled over the shelves and round about the spot, as the small stones with which it abounds are a necessity for the birds.

It is often remarked, that when a person commences breeding pigeons, having only two or three pair, he is eminently successful; but after having raised his numbers up to, perhaps, several score, his good fortune deserts him, and he breeds but few. The explanation is easy. At first his birds, being few, were not crowded. As his stock increases they become too numerous for his place, and disease, especially amongst the young birds, is the inevitable consequence. Therefore, thin out your stock for the table or market at regular periods.

Care must be taken to keep the room clean and well-aired, and in such a pigeon-house birds may be reared either for pleasure or profit—or for both.

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CHAPTER III.

Management and Food.

Always buy "squeakers" or "squabs," that is, young pigeons of about six weeks old, for it is no use to buy old ones. You may pluck their flight feathers out, or cut them short, or serve them in any other cruel way, but when they grow well enough (if you let them out), off they will go, and you will see no more of them.

As for the sort to buy, that all depends on your fancy, but I should recommend common blues to commence with, or if you want amusement, buy Tumblers. You will have amusement and gracefulness combined in Nuns, Archangels, and Owls. For profit, Runts; they do not fly well, and have good appetites, but they breed well, and make flesh very rapidly, and are cheap; and as the young fancier is sure to have some losses, they are best to try on, but they are bad nurses, and need watching, to see they do not neglect their young. Also they are excellent for the table.

Pair your birds when about six months old. Shut them up together for a few days and nights; after this you can let them fly without fear that they will desert each other. The hen will lay two eggs, one day passing between the laying of the first and second egg. The birds then manage the hatching between them, the cock generally sitting from about ten o'clock in the morning till four in the afternoon, and the hen the rest of the time. At the expiration of seventeen days from the laying of the second egg the chicks will be hatched.

Both the cock and hen feed the young, but you should always watch that they do not neglect to do so; if they do you had better put the young with some other pigeons that have proved themselves good nurses.

Pigeons will thrive well on Indian-corn, wheat, barley, pigeon beans, tares, all kinds of peas, and oats; they will also eat soaked bread, potato skins, and any kind of green food, as lettuce, cress, &c. For young pigeons, "cracked" or coarsely ground corn, or other grain, very slightly moistened with water will be found a safe and acceptable food, until they grow large enough to swallow the whole grain easily; a finely ground and very wet mush is not so good. When pigeons fly out in the country, the exercise makes them stronger, and they will eat much more than the valuable birds necessarily kept in-doors for safety. Great care should be taken that the food is old, for new peas or beans, not yet thoroughly hard and dry, purge them very strongly, their dung becomes green, and if their diet is not altered they soon become thin and light, and die.

There is no disease so fatal to pigeons as purging, and no food that brings it on so soon as new peas, beans, or tares.

Give your pigeons a bath four times a week in summer, and twice a week in winter. A round shallow pie-dish makes a very good bath; the necessity of plenty of pure water for drinking, we have before advised, but the bath is absolutely necessary; the pigeons lie down in it and shake themselves until the whole water becomes white and milky with the scurf from the skin and feathers. This way they get rid of a strange little animal that lives in the feathers, and which is called the "feather louse," differing from the "bug."

Young pigeons feed, at first, on what is called "soft food," which is a kind of soft curd formed in the crop of the old ones; they are fed with this by the young birds putting their beaks into the mouth of the old one, who then by a kind of violent effort, throws up the soft food out of its crop. As the young advance and grow stronger, the soft food of the old is no longer formed, and the peas, tares, and beans that the old ones feed on are given to the young.

The rapidity with which young "squabs" attain weight is very remarkable, and far exceeds that of any other of the gallinaceous birds which serve as food or profit to man. We will mention one instance:—

A blue Owl, mated with a Nun, hatched one "squab." The egg producing this chick had been cracked three or four days before hatching, by a blow from the Owl's wing, given in anger at its being handled for the sake of minute examination.

THE OWL.

The "squab" had grown *much* in the few hours that intervened between its exclusion and the time of its being observed. It was covered with long, yellow, cottony down, and after three days it first opened its eyes to the light.

Now, the average weight of a "domestic" pigeon's egg is about half an ounce: rather more for the larger breeds, such as Pouters and Runts, and rather less for the smaller ones—such as the parents of our chick under notice—a Collard Turtle's egg, indeed, weighs so little as a quarter of an ounce.

Yet this little creature, which at first would hardly balance a half-ounce weight, in six days after weighed *four ounces and a half*, and its feathers—or rather its feather-cases—were pricking through its skin like a hedgehog's spines.

On the twelfth day its weight was ten ounces, only one parent attending to it, and on the twenty-first, eleven ounces and three-quarters. The growth during this time seemed

principally directed to the quill feathers, which accounts for its less rapid increase in weight.

On the twenty-ninth day the weight of the "squeaker" was twelve ounces and a quarter; it was then capable of flying and feeding itself, and only wanted strength which a day or two gave it, to be a perfectly independent adult bird.

At the same date the male parent bird weighed only eleven ounces and a half; so that in a month its own young had exceeded it in weight.

Breeders differ as to the best "crosses," and, indeed, experiments in this direction form no small part of the interest given, and pleasure derived from keeping pigeons.

Here, however, each of our readers must be his own judge; we can only wish them all success in their efforts.

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CHAPTER IV.

Varieties and Different Breeds.

The Carrier.

This bird must not be confounded with the birds that are used for flying long distances and conveying letters and messages from different places to their homes.

The Carrier is too valuable a bird ever to be flown, and is simply a fancy bird, and is solely prized for its beauty and the perfection of its properties.

The chief properties of the Carrier are, the HEAD; BEAK; EYE; CARRIAGE; and COLOUR.

The head must be long, flat, and narrow; the most common fault is that of a broad skull widening out behind. What are called barrel-headed birds are also very frequent; this is when the skull rises up in a curved form in the centre.

The beak should be long, thick, and straight. Length of beak is a most important property in the carrier, a short-beaked bird, however good in other respects, being comparatively valueless. If the beak be thin, the bird is said to be

"spindle-beaked," and its value thereby greatly lessened. Some birds, otherwise very good, have a hook at the end of the beak. This takes away very much from their beautiful appearance, and again lessens their value.

THE CARRIER.

The beak-wattle is very important also. The larger the beak-wattle the better, provided it is put on the beak properly. If it is dabbed on like a shapeless mass of putty, it gives the bird a clumsy and inelegant appearance. The beak-wattle should be neat, well-tilted up behind, and should not look like a disgusting mess of dirty-white warts, which, however, is some persons' ideal of perfection.

The eye is another most important feature. A good carrier with a poor eye is an impossibility. The white skin around the ball of the eye should be flat and circular. There should be as much behind as before. If the skin is deficient at any part the bird is called "pinch-eyed."

Carriage is a most important property. A good carrier has a long, thin neck, which it holds upright. The legs are long, the feet large; the length of the bird is considerably greater than any other common variety, the Pouter excepted. A carrier should stand in an erect, commanding position, as if he were conscious of being the "King of Pigeons."

Colour, again, is very important. The most general and valued are the blacks, duns, and blues; but white and pied black and white are sometimes seen.

The blacks should be of a lustrous colour, with metallic reflections on the neck; always avoid a dull, dingy black.

The duns should also be bright and clear in tint. It is always best in breeding to match a black and a dun, as it ensures better colour than when two blacks or two duns are matched. The colour rarely mixes in the young, they are almost always pure black or pure dun.

Blue Carriers should be of a bright clear blue, and the two black bars across the wings should be well-marked, dark and distinct. Blue is considered the best colour. Silver, which is a lighter shade of blue, is sometimes seen.

White birds are much less common than even blue, therefore good whites are valuable.

Pied birds, that is, partly black and white, and partly dun and white, are occasionally seen. The way to measure the length of the beak is to take it from the front corner of the ball of the eye to the tip of the beak. One inch and six-eighths is the common length in a good bird.

Do not let your duns get in the sun too much, or the feathers will get bleached, and when the new feathers begin to come, the bird has a singular and mottled appearance.

Carriers may safely be trusted to bring up their young. They are good sitters and breeders.

Tumblers.

In size, short-faced Tumblers are amongst the very smallest of all breeds of pigeons, and the smaller they are the better.

Their legs are short, and their feet small. The breast should be very prominent, the neck and the head well thrown back, so as to give the bird that very peculiar gait or carriage so characteristic of this variety. In moving, they should step daintily on the top of their toes, and throw their head well backwards.

The head should be small, and nearly as round as a marble; the forehead high, the beak short, and the eyes placed almost in the centre of the sides of the head. In all varieties it must have what is termed a pearl or white eye, a dark, or as it is termed a "bull-eye" being one of the greatest defects of the breed. The shorter and more pointed the beak the more valuable the bird. The beak should

somewhat resemble that of the goldfinch. Colours: whole or "self-colours," black, blue, red, yellow. When the birds have a white mark under the lower bill, and white flight and tail feathers, they are called "Beards;" of these the Blue-beards are the most common.

In another breed the head is quite white, as well as the flight and tail feathers. They are then termed "Bald-heads."

The most valued of all varieties, is the Almond Tumbler. We will now describe

The Almond Tumbler.

The "Almond" is the most valued of the short-faced Tumblers. The ground colour of the plummage should be of a good rich brown tint. This, in well-marked birds, is variegated by patches of several shades of darker brown; by white and black on the flight feathers of the wings, and the quills of the tail.

It is important to know that there is a much greater price set upon birds with a deep rich ground than upon such as only have a pale yellow tint.

This arises from the fact that it is, of all colours, the hardest to acquire, as you may breed twenty with pale ground for one with deep rich ground. To be complete, the feathers of the back, rump, and breast, as well as those of the flight and tail, must be variegated, and the wings must on no account be barred, as in a common pigeon, nor must the tail or rump show the slightest stain of blue.

The Almond Tumbler never gets its full perfection of plumage until after several months; hence it increases in beauty every year, until it gets very old, when it goes off a great deal.

"Almonds" are not often "matched up" together, as better Almonds can be bred from an Almond and a Kite than from two Almond-feathered birds.

Kites.

The best "Almonds" often produce birds that almost look self-coloured, appearing perfectly black or very dark brown,

but if the quill feathers of the wing are spread out, they will be seen to be clouded, or tinted with red, or reddish brown. The birds so marked are termed Kites, and though not valued for their own colour, they breed the best Almonds if "matched up" with an Almond.

The Baldhead.

Baldheads are of various colours, black, blue, reds, yellow chequered, &c.

They must be well cut, and small, neat white heads, bright pearl eyes, clean on the thighs, ten white flight-feathers each side of the wings, and have the same deportment as the Almond. The principal marks of a good Baldhead are, the white of the head to end in a clear line level with the under-part of the eye, pearl eyes, white flights and tail, and clean thighs. The head and beak must be in every respect the same as the Almond, except of course the colour.

Blacks are the most difficult to obtain good, as they so frequently run foul about the thighs. They are very good breeders and feeders, but as their beaks are so short, it is sometimes quite advisable to put the young with better feeders.

Beards.

Beards should be marked the same as the Baldhead, except the head, which should only be white from the front of the eye and all under the lower beak, to terminate at the commencement of the throat. Some fanciers think that five or six white flight-feathers are enough, but I think it should not be less than ten, which in my opinion is the correct number.

Mottles.

These are very valuable when good. They are known as block-mottles, red-mottles, yellow-mottles, &c. In shape, size, and form they should resemble the Almond. The whole bird ought to be black, yellow, or red, &c., as the ground colour; and mottled or marked with white on

the shoulders of the wings and on the back. If there is too much white about the bird, it is said to be "gay," and is not so valuable.

Flying or Long-faced Tumbler.

These birds have the same marking of feathers as the short-faced birds, but do not possess the characters, or shape, to so high a degree of perfection. They are larger, stronger, fly well, and feed and rear their own young. Their heads are not so round, and their beaks are much longer. These birds are sometimes called "Long-faced Tumblers." Baldheads and Beards can be had of the "Long-faced" variety, but they are not so valuable.

The Pouter.

The Pouter takes its name from its power of blowing out or inflating its crop with air, until it gains a monstrous size. The birds can do this at pleasure, and good Pouters always have the crop blown out to some extent.

THE POUTER

As this large crop is the distinguishing character of the breed, the larger it is the better. It must be globular when blown out, and when not inflated it must not hang down like an empty bag.

It is a fine, bold, noble bird, and a cock ought to measure from the point of the beak to the tip of the tail from eighteen to twenty inches; it should have a fine shape and hollow back; if the back rises, it is considered a defect, and is called hog-backed. The length of the legs, from the end of the claw to the upper joint of the thigh, should not be less than seven inches. Some have their feet feathered very low. Another important point is a beautiful slenderness of body, tapering off from the shoulders. The most esteemed are those that display different colours, as the black, the blue, the yellow, the red, and the white-pieds. The first four named are all similarly marked with their respective colours, except that the blues have two distinct black bars on each wing, and a band of black near the end of the tail; otherwise they are marked alike, thus—white crescent on crop, white legs and thighs, terminating in a line, ten white flight feathers, and also a few white feathers evenly arranged on shoulders of wings, all else is coloured. Whites, of course, should be pure and spotless. But the colours are not so important as the other characteristic qualities. The yellow pied, if perfect, is more esteemed than any other.

This sort of pigeon should play erect with a fine well-spread tail, not touching the ground, nor sinking between the legs: nor must it rest upon its tail. He should draw the shoulders of his wings close to his body, displaying limbs without straddling, and should walk almost on his toes; he must not jump or kick as he moves along. When you know a pair of Pouters to be careless nurses, watch them; and as soon as the hen lays, shift the eggs into the nest of a "Dragoon," that has also lately laid; put the eggs of the Dragoon under the Pouter, to induce her to sit, or else she will go on laying and so weaken herself.

Antwerps.

The Homing Antwerp.

We prefer to have these long-faced, thinking their beak not too long at one and a quarter inch. The head should be a good length, with well-curved beak, slightly down; the

eye prominent—colour, red or gravel; broad across the shoulders; a fair depth in the keel; breast smooth; wings not too long; flight feathers broad, with strong quills; tail moderately short and narrow; any colour, but the dark blue chequer is greatly fancied for its stamina: all chequers should be dappled down the back to the tail. Blacks, blues, duns, silvers, and mealies should not have white rumps.

Show or Short-faced Antwerps.

This variety is bred for colour and shortness of face or beak.

The beak must be very short, and also like the Owl, should be very "bullet-headed," in the shape of its head. It is a good deal stouter bird than the homing pigeon. The chief colours are—

Blue, which must be a good shade throughout, with the dark shadings on the neck well defined; the tail and flight feathers are dark blue, or nearly black, the black bars across the wings being well and distinctly marked, and the rump must be blue—not white.

Silver is a bird of a fine cream colour with a powdery grey head and light tail, with red bars across the wings.

Silver-dun is the same as the silver, but the bars on the wings are black instead of red, and the tail and flight-feathers dark.

Blue chequers, ground all blue, with chequers of black or dark blue all over the wings, and down the back to the tail.

Red chequers are the same as Silvers, only they are chequered on the wings and back with red. These pigeons are not good nurses, but the "homers" are; so if you have eggs from valuable birds, it is best to put them under the "homers."

The Dragoon.

The legs and feet must be strong and well made, the former rather long, but not so long as the Carriers; the nails black.

The head should be broad, the forehead slightly raised, and from there be almost barrel-shaped, presenting no indentation. There must be no lack of development at the back of the head; neck, three-fourths the length of a Carrier's, the thinness of which adds greatly to the beauty of the bird, when set on wide shoulders with wing-butts standing well out, the body gradually tapered, flights of proportionate length, and tail compact.

The beak must be thick, black, and very slightly curved at the end, measuring exactly one and a-half inches from the centre of the eye.

The beak wattle must be of a fine powdery-white colour, shaped thus—V, when young. As the bird ages it gets wrinkled (not walnut shape), but always retains its perfect shape. There must not be any superfluous wattle under the beak.

The eye wattle small and neat. The eye itself must be wild-looking, of a dark, brilliant red colour. A Dragoon should stand clean on his legs, and have a kind of race-horse look about him. When about three years old, the beak wattle will be nearly on a level with his forehead.

The Blue Dragoon should be of a dark shiny blue, with raven black bars of medium width; particular attention being paid to the rump and thighs. There are blacks, whites, &c., but their form must be the same as the blue.

The Fantail.

As there is nothing more common-looking than the ordinary Fantail, so there is nothing more striking in fancy pigeons than a small, stylish high-bred bird. There are two strains of Fantails, with as much difference between them as there is between Tumblers; one strain being large and coarse, with immense tails; the other, small, refined, and exceedingly stylish. The first is the English and the latter the Scotch.

Those fanciers who like large tails are not content with less than thirty feathers, and with some thirty-six is the minimum: we have heard of as many as fifty-six being counted.

With birds of the finest style there are seldom more than thirty feathers in the tail. That number makes a tail of good size and weight, and is easily carried.

THE FANTAIL.

There are two varieties of feathers—long and narrow, and short and wide. The short and broad make the best tails, as there is more probability of these being well spread, and the birds to which they belong are mostly short-backed specimens.

The feathers of the tail, no matter how many in number, must form about seven-eighths of a circle. The under tail coverts must be smooth, even, and perfectly straight in position. The carriage of the fan is of the highest importance. It should be carried so that the tips of the middle feathers are directly in the centre, and must not lop to the right or left.

The preferable neck is long and graceful, curved as the letter S. It must ascend from a full round breast, and thrown far back even to the tail, and be continually in motion. The head is the head of a Dove, and should reach back so as to just touch the middle tail feathers.

The wings are carried close to the body, the tips meeting behind, beneath the tail, touching the floor the least bit in the world; the feet, coral red; the eyes, hazel in white

birds, and pearl in coloured. The shorter the back the better. The standard colour is a pure white with a purplish lustre about the neck when shaking in the sun-light. The Fantail is bred in almost every colour, but I believe seldom, if ever, to the perfection of the whites.

Points in the Fantail:—

1. *Style.* Nervous; birds always on tiptoe; continuous shaking of the neck.
2. *Size.* Small.
3. *Tail.* Feathers evenly and broadly spread; well carried.
4. *Back.* Short.
5. *Feet.* Coral red.
6. *Eye.* Hazel in white, pearl in coloured.
7. *Neck.* Long.
8. *Head.* Plain.
9. *Colour.* White.

The number of feathers in the tail is a matter of indifference, some of the best birds having but twenty-six and twenty-eight.

They are quite as good breeders and nurses as any other variety.

The Jacobin.

This pigeon is a small one, being little larger than the Tumbler. It has a range of inverted feathers, extending from the shoulders up over the head, forming what has been likened to the cape, or cowl, of a Jacobin monk.

The upper part of this feathered covering of the head is properly styled the "hood," and the lower, the "chain." These feathers, to make a handsome Jacobin, should be long, thick, and bushy.

This bird should have a very small head, with the hood reaching well over it. The hood should be white, as also the tail and flight feathers; a short spindle beak, and a pearl eye. The legs and feet may be feathered or plain, as suits the fanciers: it is immaterial.

The Ruff.

resembles the Jacobin; but it has a larger head, longer

beak, and its size is altogether larger. The chain does not reach down so near to the shoulders, and the feathers that compose it do not lie so close and compact as in the Jacobin, but an amateur fancier may easily mistake it for a Jacobin, and should be careful in selecting his birds.

The Barb.

There are many colours of Barbs, viz., Blacks, Reds, Yellows, Duns, and Whites; the preference as to colour being in the order named. In the above colours the eyes must be pearl, excepting in the white barb, which is always bull-eyed. There are many orange-eyed Barbs about, but they are no good.

THE BARB.

The Barb should have a large eye-wattle; when young it is very thin and soft, but increases in thickness and circumference as the bird increases in age up to four years. The head should be broad and quite level on the top. Some birds measure across the head from eye-wattle to eye-wattle one inch, and the eye-wattle a little over one inch in diameter. The shorter the beak the more valuable the bird.

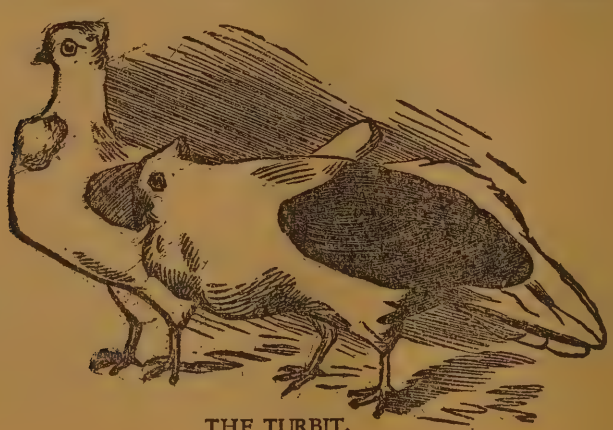
A good bird should not measure more than one and a quarter inches from the centre of the eye to the end of the beak; the beak should rather incline down, and should be of a whitish colour, but a bird with a black beak, if he is good in eye-wattle, skull, and of a good sound colour, would pass a good judge.

The flights should be very long and extend to the extreme end of the tail. They should be broad-chested, and wide across the back; upright carriage; the head set a little back. The wattle of the Barb should be bright crimson.

The feet red, toes well spread and flat upon the ground; the neck rising full from the shoulders, becoming small and thin at its connection with the head. The head is considered the most important part, and most care has been bestowed upon its points: it should be broad across, and short from before to backwards; the beak short and broad at base—it should be of the Owl variety, set on a line with the brow and head, thus presenting what is termed a "down face." The less the beak-wattle is, the better.

The Turbit.

The head of the Turbit should be small and round, very broad and high over the eye; with short face and short



THE TURBIT.

beak. The crest of the "crested" variety is composed of curling feathers, running evenly round the back of the head.

The next point is the "frill" or " purle," a line of feathers running down the breast, standing out well. In some of the best birds it is double, and curls both ways.

Colour is not of much importance as long as the bird has no foul feathers. The shoulders alone must be coloured, all the rest must be white. The thighs are a difficulty, and will frequently show some colour, especially in blues. The eye must be pearl.

But the original Blue Turbit has always a blue tail, and the Black Turbit, a black tail; which are essential accompaniments.

The Runt.

The Runt is a large bird, well formed, and compact, weighing nearly about a pound and a quarter.

THE RUNT.

The Leghorn variety is the most valued, and is a very hardy bird. It is shaped much like the Tumbler, but in size and habit is very different.

It is remarkably short from the base of the back of the neck to the root of the tail, and very full and broad-chested. It has a round head and sunken eye, surrounded by a white skin. A small wattle surrounds the base of the beak which is slightly marked. The most favourite colours are dark slate and red, but can be had in almost any colour.

Spanish Runts are smaller, long body, and a very short neck; but the Friesland Runt is the most curious of all, from its feathers all sticking out the contrary way.

The Owl.

This bird closely resembles the Turbit, and should have the same short round head and stunted beak; but they have not the crest of the Turbit, although they have the frill down the breast. There are two varieties of Owls, the English and the African. The African is a much smaller bird than the English. It is more graceful, and more valuable. Blues and silvers are the most fancied, but there are other colours to be met with—red, blue, yellow, black, and silver.

The Nun.

This is an extremely pretty bird: in shape it is something like the Tumbler. It has a tuft of feathers rising from the back of the head. To be perfect, the head, flight-feathers, and tail should be of some dark colour, either yellow, red, or black. The breast, belly, upper part of the wings, back, and neck should be pure white and there should be a frill of white feathers over the head.

According to the colour of the head it is called the yellow, red, or black-headed Nun. It should have a small head and beak, and the longer the tuft or hood is, the handsomer does the bird appear. Some fanciers like to see the Nun with white head, flight, and tail; and the rest black; this is, however, a matter of taste.

TRUMPETERS.

In shape it is something like the Runt. Their most distinguishing characteristic is the tuft of feathers which sprout out from the root of the beak, and the larger this tuft grows

THE TRUMPETER.

the better the bird. A full well-grown moustache is a great point. It has a helmet-like crest of feathers at the back of the head, and should be very feathered-footed and legged. The most usual colour is pure white, but we have seen black, and mottled.

THE ARCHANGEL.

This variety is of Russian origin. The head of the Archangel is decorated with a little plume. The head and the whole forepart of the bird is copper-coloured; the tail, wings, and hinder parts of the body, dark blue; eye, orange-red; feet, crimson. The cock has a thicker neck, a stouter bill, and is fuller about the cheeks than the hen. The hen has also a milder and more timid expression than the cock.

The Spot.

In size, form, and manners these resemble the common dove-house pigeon, and are both pretty and very productive. They are generally smooth-headed, and clean-footed; the eye is dark; as is the upper mandible, and the lower is white; on the front of the head, above the beak, is a coloured oval spot; the tail is also coloured; the rest of the plumage is a pure white. Spot and tail of the same colour, either black, blue, red, or yellow.

The Magpie.

The head, neck, crop, the scapular feathers, and the tail are coloured a black, blue, red, or yellow. The wings, the lower part of the breast, and thighs are white; and in the accuracy of their marking their value consists. The scapular feathers being dark, overlay the upper part of the wings, which causes them to appear somewhat narrow. They are called by various distinctive names according to their various colours.

The Blondinette.

Blondinettes are both plain-headed and peaked. They are self-coloured birds, and should have no white about them with the exception of the magpie markings in the flights, and the band of white on tail. There are six kinds of Blondinettes—viz., dark blue-laced, brown-laced, black-laced, silver-laced, sulphur-laced, and blue.

The Blue-laced we will describe: Head, neck, breast, back, belly, thighs, and tail, blue; the sides, saddle, and flights are most beautifully and regularly laced with a double edging, which terminates at the outer extremity in a dart-like form, upon the whole resembling a coat of mail, clear, regular, and accurate; a distinct white band within a black margin should be seen upon the tail.

The shafts of all the feathers upon the outer parts should be dark, graduating into white at their junction with the body. The head round; beak, short and black; the eye,

bright orange and full; and the legs and feet clothed with small feathers to accord in colour with body feathering, and to cover the toes to their very tips exactly similar to the leg of the grouse. This description will answer for all the others, only the colour to be different.

We have now enumerated and described all the principal varieties of pigeons; but crosses are now becoming every day more plentiful, as breeders for profit—that is, for the market—find that on crossing their birds they get quicker growing and plumper "squabs" and squeakers."

Those who breed for exhibiting purposes alone, must of course continue to do so "to a feather."

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CHAPTER V.

Diseases.

With proper care and attention to cleanliness, diet and the supply of clean water, no fear of disease need be entertained.

The really serious diseases to which pigeons are liable, are so deep-seated, obstinate, and difficult to cure, that the bird affected is better killed out of the way.

Meagrims.

Is a kind of nervous madness in which the bird loses all control over itself, and flutters about wildly, with its head turned towards its back.

When my birds are attacked by this complaint I kill them at once, for they seldom get over it. I have however, sometimes cured it by administering six drops of laudanum each twenty-four hours, till three doses have been given.

Wet Roup.

Pigeons are often liable to this disease. It is attended by a discharge from the beak and nostrils. The bird may be cured by giving it a few peppercorns with its daily food, and water given, in which a handful of green rue has been soaking for twenty-four hours.

Dry Roup.

The bird has a dry, husky cough, losing all energy, and seeking solitude. It should be fed sparingly, be kept by itself in a warm, quiet place for a few days, and should be given a few cloves of garlic every day.

Canker.

This is an unsightly scabbiness and nakedness of the skin, which is caused by the pecking of the cocks, drinking out of a metal vessel, or brought on by an undue proportion of oily diet, such as hemp, rape, &c. Abstinence and exercise, and avoiding such diet are the best remedies; but it is an obstinate complaint, and can rarely be cured before the moulting season, and frequently not then. If the skin on the naked patch be broken, it may be dusted with a little flour. Skin disease in pigeons is as hard to treat as in human beings. A strong lotion of alum and water is very good. Apply every day.

There are other diseases to which pigeons succumb, arising from internal weaknesses, known amongst fanciers as *Gizzard-faller, Navel-faller,* and others, but as these only attack weak birds, it is perhaps best to kill them off as soon as the symptoms appear.

Vermin.

By keeping your place clean you will get no vermin, but if you once do get them, you will have a great deal of trouble to get rid of them.

If you have the misfortune to get your birds infested you can do no better than fumigate them, very thoroughly, with tobacco smoke, and sprinkle the house and nests with an *Insect Powder*. I always keep my place sprinkled with it, so can speak as to its worth.

A last word of advice here as to disease: keep your pigeon-houses *clean*, and you will not have to play the part of doctor—in fact, one will not be wanted.

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CHAPTER VI.

Miscellaneous Notes.

To Discriminate between the Sexes.

The cock's breastbone is longer than the hen's; her vent bones are set wider apart, but this varies with age. The coo of the cock is louder and more sonorous than that of the hen, which is shorter and more hurried; neither does the hen coo so much as the cock. If you have a doubtful bird, put it into the matching pen for a day or so, then put in a merry cock, and if it is a hen he will at once play up to her, sweep his tail on the ground, coo, and do all sorts of odd things; if it is a cock, they will fight at once .

Salt-Cat.

Some fanciers put a lump of rock salt in the pigeon house, but this is generally too hard for the birds' bills. A better plan is to mix mortar-rubbish from an old wall with about an eighth of its bulk of common salt, and keep the mixture slightly damp in a pan for the birds to peck at. An old soft red brick is also very good.

Pigeons are often accused—and truly—with damaging the brickwork of roofs and chimneys, by picking out the

mortar; but if they are properly supplied with Salt-Cat, they will leave the walls alone.

How to Construct a Water Fountain.

Procure a round earthenware dish about the size of a soup plate, the rim being about two inches high; a glass soda-water bottle must then—by means of a simple stand, constructed by twisting pieces of iron wire together in such a manner, so as to hold the bottle in an inverted position—be placed inside the dish, so that the mouth of the bottle is elevated half an inch above the utensil in question, which must be filled with water. Before placing the bottle in the stand fill it, turn it briskly upside down, and place it in the position required, and the water will flow into the dish for a second or two, when, by the pressure of the atmosphere on the water, the latter will retain its position until the water is drunk up by the birds, when the dish will immediately fill up again.

Hints on Fattening.

To fatten your birds rapidly, begin when the "squabs" are eighteen or nineteen days old: put them by themselves in a nest in a separate room, and cover them with a basket or inverted hamper, so as to keep out the light, and yet allow a free passage for air. All animals artificially fattened, get on best in the dark.

Have ready a quantity of corn, which has been steeped in water for twenty-four hours; twice a day, early in the morning and in the evening before nightfall, take each "squeaker" out of the nest, open its bill dexterously, and at each meal cause it to swallow, according to its breed and size, from fifty up to eighty, or even a hundred grains of the steeped maize.

Continue this treatment for ten days or a fortnight, and you will have your pigeons as fat as the best poultry.

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